

**FINAL  
CHARTER TOWNSHIP OF COMMERCE  
PARKS AND RECREATION COMMITTEE MEETING**

*Monday, November 25, 2024*  
2009 Township Drive  
Commerce Township, Michigan 48390

**CALL TO ORDER:** Chairperson Walker called the meeting to order at 6:00pm.

**ROLL CALL:** **Present:** Johnny Walker, Chairperson  
William Petsch, Vice Chairperson  
Bob Berkheiser  
Ron Krueger  
Denise Vecellio

**Absent:** Krystal Schwartz, Secretary (excused)  
Laura Waterworth (excused)  
Mark Schoder, Maintenance Director

**Also Present:** Emily England, Director of Senior Services/Parks & Recreation  
Allison Kennedy, Asst. to Parks & Recreation Director

**COMMUNICATIONS:**

None.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES:**

**MOTION** by Petsch, seconded by Vecellio, to approve the October 28, 2024, Parks and Recreation Committee Regular Meeting Minutes.

**MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY**

**PUBLIC COMMENTS**

**Chairperson Walker opened to Public Comments.**

There were no comments.

**Chairperson Walker closed to Public Comments.**

**ITEM 1: BYERS HISTORICAL MARKER**

Director England discussed the following with the Committee:

- Ellen has worked diligently. She reached back out to the State. They have reviewed this application and said that they're on the right road as far as the story they're telling.
- I put the application in your packet along with the proposed narrative.
- If anyone wants to see the supporting documentation, I do have the binder here and I'll have it in my office.
- I wanted to make sure you had a chance to look over it.
- Is there anything that sticks out to anybody, or any areas of concern?
- If you're happy with the way this reads, you can make a motion to move it onto the Township Board. We can also send it to the attorneys to review as well.

- There is nothing too specific to any structures, so you're not going to be bound by those requirements.
- I think she did a good job of telling the story of the property itself and why it's important to the Township.

Vice Chairperson Petsch – Emily, you didn't see anything?

Director England – I did not see anything that stood out to me as a concern. I will have our attorneys review it, and then obviously the Township Board members will also have an opportunity to review it.

Mr. Krueger – So we want to move it forward for them to approve it?

Chairperson Walker – Yes, we move it forward for the Township Board to approve it.

**MOTION** by Petsch, supported by Krueger, to forward the Byers Historical Marker request to the Township Board of Trustees for approval.

Discussion –

Berkheiser – You said this was done in coordination with the State. So, whatever we have here complies with the State?

England – Yes, Ellen reached out to her and had another meeting with her after putting together this narrative. They were happy with it. Obviously we can meet with them as well, if you feel it's necessary. If you have any specific questions and you want clarification, we can definitely do that before it goes to the Township Board.

Berkheiser – On Page 5 of 7, it says the proposed marker title. Does that really matter?

England – You pick the title.

Berkheiser – It says *Walrod Byers Farm* or *Abram Walrod Settlement*. My only question is, should it be coordinated with the name of the park? Does that really matter? What's the purpose of that marker title? My thought was, should we say *Byers Farmhouse History* or something, and then under that in parentheses, *(Abram Walrod / June Byers)*.

England – I wouldn't want it to say Farmhouse because then you're referencing the house itself. We don't want to reference the structures specifically. I think they're telling the story of Abram Walrod. That's a significant piece of our history, so you want his name in it, but they've also touched base on the history of June Byers. I think the idea is just to incorporate the two together. You want a name that is going to flow. I don't know if *The Walrod / Byers Farm* is my favorite.

Karen Schantz – What about *Homestead* instead of Farm?

Petsch – Karen, I'm interested to hear your comments.

Karen Schantz – *Walrod / Byers Homestead*, because it has always been called a Homestead since its existence to anyone. I've been here since 1961 and that is how it has always been known.

England – You want the name of it to follow the narrative.

Berkheiser – So then are we looking to change the name of the park?

England – No.

Berkheiser – I'm not sure I agree, but that's okay. I'm just one vote.

England – That's always a discussion you can have. That was just never my intention that you would change the name of the park.

Berkheiser – I guess I don't know; if we're naming the marker and that's what is going to be mounted somewhere, I don't like just using their last names, but I do like *Homestead*.

England – And I do like the way that the *Abram Walrod Settlement* reads, but how could we incorporate the *June Byers* name with that?

Karen Schantz – It's on the national registry still under *Byers Homestead*.

England – Yes, but she told us to avoid that.

Karen Schantz – Right, to avoid it, but it's there when people look it up.

England – That's true, it is.

Berkheiser – So that's my only question when it comes to that.

England – Is there a character limit for the title?

Karen Schantz – No.

Berkheiser – So based on your comments, I don't like the *Farm*. I do like the *Homestead*. I think having full names would be more appropriate. It could be *Abram Walrod / June Byers*, although it's not really her settlement.

England – Could you say *June Byers Homestead*? Could it be *Abram Walrod Settlement / June Byers Homestead*? I don't know if that's too much.

Berkheiser – I would tell you that generally, it would be this entity that should try to come up with something if we feel that strongly about it. We should note that to the Township Board. I'm not looking to hold it up. It would be at the December meeting.

England – December 10<sup>th</sup> is the Township Board meeting.

Krueger – But your view is going to have a lot of weight with the Township.

Berkheiser – Probably not. I think it's the view of this group. I'll support both sides, even if I disagree, or at least explain both sides. I'm not disagreeing with moving it on. I'm just commenting on the title of the marker. Maybe it doesn't make any difference and I'm okay with that too.

Dean Schantz – I think the direction they were going in is that they want to keep it called the *Homestead*, and they want June Byers, because she is a whole separate entity. That is the identity of the park, but it's not the identity of the Homestead. The historical marker will identify the original homestead, where that house sits. They're kind of two separate things as I read it.

England – Yes.

Berkheiser – Based on that, I would pull June out of the title of the marker and just leave it as *Abram Walrod*, then maybe say *Homestead or Settlement*.

England – I like the *Abram Walrod Settlement*. And, if we're going to leave the park the same name, is that acceptable to you? To have the marker be titled *Abram Walrod Settlement*? Because it was the settlement. And then, leave the park name the same to bring in the Byers name. June Byers is referenced on the sign, but it's not in the title.

Karen Schantz – If they reference her, she is the longest living person on that property.

Berkheiser – Yes, but from 1940, to me, it doesn't seem like that's very historical.

England – But that's her history too, that's not the history to the Township. So, Abram Walrod is the significant history to the Township. I'm not saying that you overlook June Byers; she has her own history. The park is named after her, and like Karen said, you can find Byers Homestead on the registry also. I'm comfortable with that as long as everyone is in agreement.

Berkheiser – Then I guess I would say strike the first part where it says, "...or alternatively". I would amend our motion to say the proposed marker title be, *Abram Walrod Settlement*.

Petsch – Okay, **I'll amend my motion for the proposed marker title to be, *Abram Walrod Settlement***, with the listings front and rear of the history, which I believe includes June, correct?

England – Yes.

Karen Schantz – That’s the largest part of it.

Petsch – Okay.

Krueger – And I still support.

**MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY**

Mr. Berkheiser – Just for clarification, that change should be made on Page 5 and Page 6, where it talks about sponsoring individual organizations.

Director England – Yes. I will get back with Ellen. I'm actually going to send this out to the Township Board in the next couple of days so the Trustees have plenty of time to review everything and send it over to the attorneys.

## **ITEM 2: LEAGUE AND COMMUNITY SERVICE ORGANIZATION REPORT**

### **Interlakes Girls Softball – Jeremiah Fick**

Mr. Fick shared the following with the Committee.

- Nothing really major to report.
- Registration is open for next year.
- Moving forward and expecting another season as usual.

Director England – If you email us with the information, we can share that on our social media and on our website.

Mr. Fick – Sure.

Mr. Berkheiser – Have winterizations been done?

Mr. Fick – The girls’ side has been winterized.

Director England – The bathroom should have been winterized as well. I will double check that.

### **Motor City Mountain Bike Association – Mike Kearney**

Mr. Kearney shared the following with the Committee.

- Really nothing to report.
- As the weather gets into the freeze/thaw, we will see less use of the trails, up until it actually freezes.

### **Friends of Byers – Dean & Karen Schantz**

Mr. Schantz shared the following with the Committee.

- Last week, we got the electrical finalized in the farmhouse.
- This past week, we started staging the farmhouse and putting everything back the way it was.
- We’re getting ready for our Christmas event on December 8<sup>th</sup>.
- I don’t know if we’re planning anything as far as the Scouts this fall, if we have time to do that before the snow hits.
- We’re planning for next year, including the Bicentennial event. I’d like to coordinate with Larry Gray.

Director England – You need to talk to us too. We’re heading up that event.

Mr. Schantz – Okay, so yes, at some point we will touch base on ideas.

Mr. Berkheiser – When you say Christmas event, you're talking about Photos with Santa which will be in the farmhouse this year?

Mr. Schantz – Right. We did it last year and it worked out fantastic.

### **Silo Ranch – Joe Ray**

Mr. Ray shared the following with the Committee.

- Not a whole lot going on, just more work on fencing.
- We are tentatively trying to do a kids' camp between Christmas and New Years'. It's short notice, but hopefully it will happen. Nothing has been finalized yet.

Mr. Berkheiser – You have started your trail rides?

Mr. Ray – Yes.

Mr. Berkheiser – How has that been?

Mr. Ray – It's a soft opening. We haven't done a whole lot of advertising. The first one ever was a marriage proposal. It was a private ride. She said yes.

Vice Chairperson Petsch – Where do you go? Where would the trail be?

Mr. Ray – Into Proud Lake Recreation Area.

Vice Chairperson Petsch – Through Proud Lake; and about how long?

Mr. Ray – The average ride is an hour. It starts at Silo, and then comes through our property, which borders Silo. We built a trail that comes through.

Vice Chairperson Petsch – Where do you cross Wixom Road?

Chairperson Walker – You don't have to.

Mr. Berkheiser – You go through their property off Chickory Lane.

Vice Chairperson Petsch – Okay, through the back way, like the cross-country trails?

Mr. Ray – I'm not the horse person.

Chairperson Walker – One of the benefits of them taking over Silo was that their land backs up to one of the old trailheads, which was headed off when they built the houses. They had the ability to open that trailhead back up and use it for personal use. They held the golden key to the trails.

Vice Chairperson Petsch – Is there a cost for the trail ride?

Mr. Ray – Yes. Again, I'm not the horse person. I'm strictly property maintenance.

Vice Chairperson Petsch – And, just finding out for my grandkids, what age limits are there?

Mr. Berkheiser – He is not the horse person.

Mr. Ray – I believe it's around 10. There is an age limit for sure.

Mr. Berkheiser – You have to wear a helmet and all that fun stuff.

Mr. Ray – It will be advertised in the spring. Spring and fall are the times when they happen. Summer is too hot and there are too many bugs.

Mr. Berkheiser – So pass on, and maybe Emily knows, I thought there was talk of Proud Lake cutting out horse stuff.

Director England – They did not cut it out, but they made them multipurpose trails. There are a lot of trails that will cross over and be shared with mountain bikers.

Mr. Berkheiser – I just want to make sure that they know there is potential for horses.

Director England – Yes, it's highly used. I don't think shared trails are good for either group.

Mr. Kearney – The trails have always been shared at Proud Lake, at least on the west side of Wixom Road. Over the past two years, there has been a trail separation effort. The previous shared trails are now equestrian-only and there are new mountain bike trails. On the east side, between the campground and Wixom Road, there's both shared trails and bike-only trails that bypass the campground. On the west side, it is going to be trail separation. So, #1 and #2 are equestrian-only, and #3 and #4 got redone so there's mountain bike loops and then equestrians.

### **CW3 Soccer**

Director England – CW3 reached out and the only update they had is that the fields are closed for the season.

*No representatives were present at the meeting for the following leagues:*

- *Lakes Athletics Association*
- *Lakes Area Hawks*
- *Commerce Little League*

### **ITEM 3: TOWNSHIP BOARD REPORT**

Mr. Berkheiser provided the following:

- The budget was approved, so we can start in January. Technically, the money will be there, so we just need to get our act together. Whatever your parks are, think about what we talked about and keep it in the front of your mind so that we process our bid packages and everything we need to do.
- We approved the contract in favor of the anonymous donor for the fencing and the idea of the naming rights.
- We approved the 2025 schedules and holidays.

**ITEM 4: PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT REPORT**

Director England discussed the following:

- Everything is in my written report.
- We're gearing up and doing the final touches on our Tree Lighting event which is December 7<sup>th</sup> from 4:30pm to 7:30pm.
- Today or tomorrow, they're supposed to be finishing paving at Victory Park, and the Kayak Launch will be done later this week. Those projects are moving forward.
- The fencing contract was getting signed. There was one piece we were missing from the contractor, but that should still be on goal to be completed this year.

Vice Chairperson Petsch – Emily, once we have that paving finished, are we going to open that up for people to park and go back there?

Director England – At Victory, DTE is doing our lights back there. Once the lights are done, then we will advertise that people can go back there. Unfortunately, we've had vandalism issues.

Discussion took place regarding addressing vandalism issues at Victory.

**ITEM 5: MAINTENANCE DEPARTMENT REPORT**

Director England – Mark provided the following report:

- Bridges are all cleaned and sealed. Some repairs are scheduled.
- Leaf cleanup at parks and buildings is going on and will continue until finished. The new leaf vac, riding leaf vac/blower and dump trailer have helped greatly. We now use less manpower and time to complete.
- All trails are being cleared regularly and will continue until leaves stop dropping.
- Trash cans in parks are being cleaned and thinned out. With the end of events, parks do not need as many cans out.
- Four cameras have been placed around Victory Park's new paved areas.
- Another wood parking stop was damaged at Wise Woods and has been replaced.
- Maple Glen and Scarlet's restrooms have been winterized as well as all sprinkler systems throughout the Township.
- Pickleball courts at Richardson and Bicentennial Park have been winterized, meaning the nets have been taken down.
- The pavilion roof at the library has been cleaned.
- The grill pad and grill have been installed at Long Park.
- We will begin clearing brush and dead trees at Dodge Park to make viewing the park from South Commerce Road more visible.

Mr. Berkheiser – What damage was done on the Wise Woods side?

Director England – It's the wood parking stoppers. Someone backed up too far into it.

Mr. Berkheiser – Okay, so that's not what we're considering vandalism.

Director England – No.

Mr. Berkheiser – We don't have power on that side?

Director England – No.

Mr. Berkheiser – We should be able to tap in by running it 100 feet under the road?

Director England – Yes, if we wanted to light that parking lot.

Mr. Berkheiser – I don't think we want to light it, but we might think about putting motion lights in there.

#### **ITEM 6: PARK LIAISON REPORTS**

##### **Berkheiser – Wise Woods & Victory Park**

- You've been listening to updates on Wise Woods and Victory Park.
- We don't have to wait for the dog park piece to open up the road. I don't even know why we have to wait for lights to open up the road, because technically, our rules are that it's closed at sundown.

Director England – It's not stopping people now. I would like it to be lit before we do a grand opening of the park. Lights will deter undesirable behavior.

Mr. Berkheiser – Have we thought about putting up a fence/gate to block the road that gets locked on the way home?

Director England – There are too many entry points.

Mr. Berkheiser – Looking forward to opening it up. I've heard from quite a few folks who are interested in the dog park.

##### **Vecellio – Long Park & Snowy Ridge Park**

- Nothing to report on Snowy Ridge.
- At Long Park, I'm guessing Mark already knows about this, but one of the picnic tables has a slat that is dilapidated. It's pulled out. I can send you a picture.
- Other than that, the park looks great.

##### **Walker – Maple Glen**

- Did we hear anything about that big maple tree yet?

Director England – As far as removal?

Chairperson Walker – Yes. Are they going to remove it?

Director England – We have to remove it. I just have to get the final okay from Larry to have the guy go over and do it.

Chairperson Walker – Other than that, everything looks good. It has gotten quieter over there now that there are no games going on.

Mr. Berkheiser – Is the big tree going to take out something else?



Director England – The big maple tree is right next to the restroom building.

Mr. Berkheiser – Is it going to hit one of the buildings?

Director England – It’s going to hit something no matter which way it falls.

Chairperson Walker – It’s big.

Mr. Fick – It might be the last maple at Maple Glen.

**Petsch – Bicentennial Park**

- Nothing new to report.
- Everything is good.

**Krueger – Dodge Park**

- Over the weekend, I went to Scarlet’s Playground. There were a dozen people in there having a good time. They were commenting about how cold it was, but how much fun the kids were having.
- Last time, I talked about the benches. The wood is fine, but there are some stains on the benches that look bad. They might have to be cleaned.
- I had an experience with an electric scooter. The guy came shooting through, blowing his horn for people to get out of the way, while he was going from the driveway around the playground side of the bathrooms and out. I wanted to yell at him, but I was a little too far away.

Director England – You just have to call the police. They’re aware of it.

Mr. Krueger – The police were sitting there in a pickup. I don’t know if he saw it or not. I didn’t notice if there was any posting about not having motorized vehicles.

Director England – It’s in our ordinance and it’s on the park entry signs, “No Motorized Vehicles” on parkland.

Mr. Krueger – Okay. Other than that, everybody was having a good time, and everything looked great. Also on the Library side, the old playground equipment was being used too.

Open discussions continued regarding fast speeds that scooters and e-bikes travel, dangers they present, and ordinance enforcement.

**Schwartz – Byers and Mill Race**

- No report in Schwartz’s absence.

**Waterworth – Hickory Glen Park**

- No report in Waterworth’s absence.

**ITEM 7: VILLAGE OF WOLVERINE UPDATE**

No report in Waterworth’s absence.

**ITEM 8: COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS**

**MOTION** by Petsch, supported by Walker, to appoint Johnny Walker as Vice Chairperson, William Petsch as Chairperson, and Krystal Schwartz as Secretary of the Parks & Recreation Committee. **MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY**

**ITEM 9: DOG PARK RULES**

Mr. Berkheiser – So, is the first page what you’re proposing our rules to be?

Ms. Kennedy – Correct.

Mr. Berkheiser – I have some questions. When we say dogs must have a current license; first off, are we requiring people to register with us to use the park? To get a license, you have to have current vaccinations.

Director England – Correct, you have to have the rabies shot.

Mr. Berkheiser – And the license is good for how long?

Director England – You can do a 1-year or a 3-year.

Mr. Berkheiser – How long are the shots good for?

Director England – 3 years.

Mr. Berkheiser – Why no dogs under 4 months?

Director England – Vaccinations; they would not be completely vaccinated at that point.

Mr. Berkheiser – Okay. So we say, *Owners must pick up all pet waste*. Is part of this going to be putting in a bag station, like a commercial one?

Director England – They were just delivered to our office.

Mr. Berkheiser – And we, the Township, unfortunately it’s probably going to be Mark, will restock them?

Director England – Yes. We talked about that at the last meeting where we will do a Wednesday shutdown. He will let me know how many hours it will take them to clean, restock and mow.

Mr. Berkheiser – Okay, then #10 says, *No food, animal or human, is permitted in the park*. Maybe it’s just the way I read it, but should we put it into parentheses?

Director England – Yes.

Mr. Berkheiser – In looking through the other stuff you had in there, I do like that chart that compares everything. On the third page, Oakland County Parks; first off, is that only for Oakland County Parks, or does that apply to all parks in Oakland County?

Director England – It's Oakland County Parks. I want to adopt the language that's on here, and the language about contacting the police.

Vice Chairperson Petsch – Can we go back? One of the things was the water bowl situation. Are we going to have a water supply here?

Director England – Eventually.

Vice Chairperson Petsch – You can't take your dog to the park if there's no water without bringing water.

Director England – Laura emailed the same thing. She said we should allow water bowls, just not something that can stay that would become a communal bowl, which can spread disease. You can bring your own personal water bowl. We can reword that.

Vice Chairperson Petsch – On that point, you're going to allow someone to bring a collapsible bowl to give the dog water while they're there, right?

Director England – Yes. We will just change the wording so it is known that you can't just fill a water bowl and leave it under a tree because anybody's dog could drink from it. Then the whole bottom section on the Oakland County Park page, I like that language.

Mr. Berkheiser – I do like that language, or most of it. I also like the language near the end. It says the Oakland County Sheriff's Department Dispatch with the actual phone number. It does say, if it's an emergency, call 9-1-1, and then it says the park address.

Director England – That is the Madison Heights sign, *Dog Bite / Fight Information*.

Mr. Berkheiser – Right, yes that one. Then there's someplace in there I read that *violations are a misdemeanor*.

Director England – Yes, and I will verify the language with Wendy.

Mr. Berkheiser – It's on Oakland County's; *may result in a misdemeanor*. I do like a lot of the Oakland County Park rules. We ought to look at merging ours with them. Why 2 dogs? Do we think that's all they can handle?

Director England – It's consistent throughout all of the rules.

Chairperson Walker – You want to avoid a dog walker bringing in 10 dogs and letting them go.

Mr. Berkheiser – I think those were all of my questions.

Director England – If everybody is okay with this, we will put it together and send it to the Township Board for final approval.

**MOTION** by Krueger, supported by Vecellio, to accept the Dog Park rules as discussed herein.  
**MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY**

**ITEM 10: LONG PARK SIGN PHOTO CONTEST**

Director England – I've reached out to the sign company. They will hold the price that I showed you last month until spring. We have to hold off on doing our photo contest because the Township is doing their Township-wide photo contest. We don't want there to be any confusion. We will do it in February or thereafter.

**ITEM 11: PARK IMPROVEMENT UPDATES**

Director England – We have given those to you as far as Victory and Wise. As Bob said, we're gearing up for next year. We're working with Giffels on designing the extra parking at the Richardson Center, and looking at different restroom options that have a storage unit, or possibly doing a standalone storage unit for Parks & Recreation. We're setting priorities and getting the ball rolling on those projects to start early in the year so we can get them bid out.

Mr. Berkheiser – Where are we at with the well at Victory?

Director England – Last Tuesday, I gave Jason the whole file on that site and the ground contamination that was found before the State purchased the property. When the Department of Defense was doing their clean up, it was contamination that was found during that time, and it was referenced in there that they had testing wells that they repeatedly checked to make sure the contamination did not get into the groundwater. From what we can see, it never did. Those studies were done by EGLE, which would have been DEQ at that time. He is reaching back out to Oakland County and EGLE to see if there is some kind of testing we can do. This property can't be deemed this for the rest of its life without proper proof.

Mr. Berkheiser – Should we bring in our two Oakland County Commissioners, and/or a State person?

Director England – I think it's going to be the State. Let's see what they come back to us with.

**ITEM 12: PARK EVENT UPDATES**

Ms. Kennedy – The Tree Lighting is December 7<sup>th</sup> from 4:30pm to 7:30pm. Santa generally arrives around 5:30pm, which is when we do the tree lighting and then pictures with Santa start. We have kids' activities. The Library will do story time, cookies and hot cocoa. We are going to do a lighted walk around the center on the paved pathway. At our January meeting, we will have all of the 2025 event dates for you.

**ITEM 13: OTHER MATTERS**

Vice Chairperson Petsch – Emily, is the plug by the bridge still holding out over at Byers, from the aquifer that we hit?

Director England – We just had our meeting on Friday with EGLE to come out and check the site and give it the all clear. He did, so we are good, and we never want to speak of it again.

Mr. Berkheiser – Have we looked at power washing at Richardson?

Director England – They did it.

Mr. Berkheiser – The other thing on my list was treatment of the river.

Director England – I have a contact at EGLE that I need to speak to. I was just letting the dust settle.

**The next Parks and Recreation Meeting is scheduled for December 16, 2024, at 6:00PM at the Township Hall. (No park visits before meetings from November to March)**

**ITEM 14: ADJOURNMENT**

**MOTION** by Krueger, supported by Petsch, to adjourn the meeting at 6:45pm.

**MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY**

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Krystal Schwartz, Secretary